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ABSTRACT

The writing adjunct course, an individualized composition course offered in conjunction with subject-area courses at six campuses of California State University, is offered as an alternative to the traditional instruction of advanced composition. The purposes of the course are to help students express their ideas, rather than locate their errors, and to develop students' ideas on a wide range of subjects as well as on the analysis of literature. The course's major objective, however, is to train the student to become his or her own editor. Throughout the term, students write papers assigned in their subject-area course and have weekly interviews with a writing adjunct instructor or peer tutor to discuss their work in progress and receive suggestions for revision. In addition to these individual interviews, the course includes class sessions on general principles and small group sessions on specific issues such as discipline-specific conventions and editing skills. The emphases throughout are on revision rather than on spontaneous essays and on the composing process rather than on the finished product. (CC)

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Advanced Composition—Alternatives
Conference on Student Writing Skills
Workshop
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The Writing Adjunct

It is with some reluctance that I embark on such a pragmatic presentation when, in a concurrent session, Bill Leary and Bob Macdonald are engaged in the noble task of generating a rationale for Freshman Composition - - replete with pastoral analogies. I fear that I come before you more as a mechanic with a set of instructions for assembling a lawnmower than as a Theocritus.

You will note that the conference program suggests an interesting difference between the state of Freshman Composition and that of Advanced Composition. In the case of Freshman Composition, we are searching for a rationale but with Advanced Composition we are moving right on to alternatives. And if we were asked what our rationale for Advanced Composition is, who could answer? Do we really know what we want to accomplish in those offerings? Or to put it more realistically, is there any relationship between what we hope to accomplish and what we can accomplish?

If we do have a clear sense of what we are about in Advanced Composition, then it is one of the better kept secrets of the college catalog. In most cases the description for Freshman Composition reads, "emphasis on expository writing supplemented by critical reading," or "devoted to non-fictional prose and prose fiction with heavy emphasis on expository writing." The statement on Advanced Composition has a more-of-the-same ring: "advanced composition," or "further expository writing." We can expect then, that those students who liked their first dose of expository writing, (most likely the students who did well), will return for "further expository writing," whereas those who detested their Freshman Composition experience, or did poorly, or perhaps believe that when you've taken one composition course, you know them all, choose not to return to Advanced Composition. And why should a student take Advanced Composition, particularly if he needs only to graduate and not to be certified literate, as is the case on most of our campuses at present? What do we have to offer in Advanced Composition?

Too often in the past we have considered the Freshman Composition course only as a service course and have pictured Advanced Composition at the other end of the scale as a reserve for the intellectually sophisticated,

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or at least the academically able, who were ready to tangle with the philosophical issues underlying the problems of expository writing. Now, we are saved from that temptation by the level of student writing ability. But where do we begin in redesigning the curriculum for Advanced Composition? Are we to forge on teaching five types of exposition to students who cannot write three sequential sentences? Or do we simply assume that students cannot write and then repeat the introductory composition course under a different heading? Out of necessity, many of our campuses are doing just that. The professional joke that advanced composition is neither "advanced" nor "composition" has given way in many instances to the sad confession that Advanced Composition is an upper division "remedial" course.

If students no longer come to the Advanced Composition class in homogeneous groupings (and one wonders if they ever did), then it seems reasonable to assume that no single response will meet all needs. Our composition curricula will have to allow for individual differences both in the number of options that we offer and within some of those options. It is as one such option that I will describe the Writing Adjunct, an individualized composition course that is offered in conjunction with a college course in a different subject area. Adjunctive writing courses take a number of forms; they may be co position courses related to a student's future profession (as in the Legal Writing Course outlined by John White), or linked to the student's major (as in the many writing courses for Business or Public Administration), or linked to a single course. Such a pragmatic approach to the teaching of writing seems, to some, to sacrifice ideals, to treat writing more as a tool than an art. But we might well recall that the entry of English into the secondary curriculum was a humble one. When that concerned group of citizens gathered in Boston, in 1810, to establish what they hoped to call the English Classical School, but were forced by purists to call the English High School, they had as their goal an education that would prepare the student for "active life and ...serve as a foundation for eminence in his profession whether Mercantile or Mechanical."

Whatever was gained with the acceptance of English into the secondary curriculum was all but lost in both secondary institutions and colleges with

the relegation of English Composition to the departments of English. For once composition was neatly deposited within a department, the rest of the college could relax its efforts in the teaching of writing. And frequently the teacher of composition fell into that time-honored trap of all teaching: he justified his existence by making his subject matter incomprehensible without his intercession. He began to talk more about fragments, participles, and gerundives, than about the ideas locked in the students' fragments, or dangling in their participles. Soon the students began to feel helpless and, with reinforcement for the teaching of writing rapidly vanishing outside the English class, they gave up. Ideas they shared with their friends: compositions they wrote for English teachers.

Now, if we are to draw ideas back into the composition classroom, we need to convince students that we are more interested in helping them express their ideas than in locating errors, and that we are interested in their ideas on a wide range of subjects as well as the analysis of literature. Adjunctive writing courses have been successful both because of the motivation of the students and the efforts of faculty in other disciplines to reinforce the teaching of writing.

The particular adjunctive writing course that I am to present was developed at the Small College, Dominguez Hills, and during the past year has been tested on six CSUC campuses under the aegis of a grant from the Division of New Program Development and Evaluation.

Though the notion that every faculty member incorporate instruction in composition into his regular teaching is readily accepted, it is less readily practiced. The Writing Adjunct creates a structure whereby a composition instructor can work in cooperation with instructors in other subject areas, the subject matter instructor offering support and reinforcement in the teaching of writing without displacing his own curriculum for one in composition. By permitting the student to take a writing course in conjunction with a course in another subject area, the student is put in the best possible situation for writing. He is already attending classes, listening to lectures, participating in discussions and reading in the subject area, so that when he comes to write much of the work of pre-writing is complete. By individualizing

the writing course, students are able to learn what they most need to know at any particular time (there is little point in teaching the fine points of semi-colon usage, for instance, if the student begins and ends sentences on the basis of whim). Yet even more important than offering the student instruction in what the instructor feels he needs to know is the possibility of bringing the student to the point where he decides that there is something he wants to learn from the composition course. So from this point, let us follow the course of the Writing Adjunct with an entering student.

Before a course is listed as offering a Writing Adjunct, the instructor of the course in the subject area must agree, plan to assign some writing and file a copy of his writing assignments with the Writing Adjunct staff. The class schedule indicates whether or not a course offers a Writing Adjunct. Since the Writing Adjunct is offered as a separate course, the Writing Adjunct instructor is free to set objectives, make assignments, establish standards and administer grades; thus, many of the problems that arise with optional writing labs are skirted.

During the first week of the terms each student attends an initial interview with a member of the Writing Adjunct staff (whether or not an adjunct program is partially staffed with tutors depends on the particular campus). The student brings a sample of his writing to the initial interview. During the interview he completes a brief grammar pre-test and he discusses his goals in composition for the upcoming term. When students are asked for their goals in composition, they are frequently silent, not only because they haven't been asked this question before but because many have never thought that their goals had any place in a composition course. For most students as with most writers, writing is difficult and their goal is more likely "to have written" than "to write". At the close of the first interview, the student is encouraged to keep thinking about possible goals, a file is established for the student in the Writing Adjunct office and the student is asked to return for a second interview the following week.

Before the student returns, a member of the Writing Adjunct staff will have evaluated his grammar pre-test (to determine whether the student might benefit more by taking a composition course with a different emphasis, say for instance, a course with heavy emphasis on basic skills) and will have

completed a critique of the student's writing sample, listing the areas where the student might be advised to concentrate his efforts. When the student returns, the discussion of writing goals is re-opened and by this time, in most cases, the student is ready to suggest at least one area where he feels unprepared. The members of the Writing Adjunct staff should be ready to translate statements: "I just can't seem to get started" suggests thesis development as a goal, "My teachers always say that my papers wander" may call for outlining, and "I know what I mean I just can't seem to say it" often calls for work on limiting the subject. Through a process of discussion, the student and the staff member gradually produce a list of goals, the number of goals depending on the unit value and length of the Writing Adjunct course.

At the close of the second meeting the student establishes a contact time when he will be free to meet with an instructor or tutor on a weekly basis. He is told that instruction in the Writing Adjunct will be given through a combination of class sessions on general principles, small group sessions on specific issues (discipline-specific conventions or editing skills) and individual tutorial. Finally he receives a checklist outlining the components of the course so that he can keep track of his progress.

The central focus of the teaching in the Writing Adjunct is always on the student's expository writing required by his other courses, so writing goals and assignments are designed to complement that purpose. During the tutorials, the student may discuss the scope of his topic, the development of his thesis, his research techniques, and any of the conventions of the particular discipline in which he is writing. There is no need, for instance, for the student to learn of the conventions outlined in the MLA style sheet when he is working on a chemistry paper, nor the format for the presentation of a case history if he is working on a philosophy paper.

When the student submits his draft to the Writing Adjunct he does so with the clear understanding that it is a draft and that he is still in the early stages of the composing process (no matter that he may have been in the habit of submitting drafts as final papers in the past). When the draft is received by the Writing Adjunct, it is read by two members of the staff. Usually the first reader is a peer tutor who notes suggestions

for revision on one side of a review sheet and the second reader an instructor who makes his comments on the other side of the same sheet, ranking suggestions for revision in order of importance as he goes. When tutors work in the Writing Adjunct program, they receive training in offering constructive suggestions for revision. There are two types of assistance they are not permitted to give: the first is labelling bad usage with a string of coded symbols—G, SS cliches, AWK; the second is rewriting passages for students. The student sees the provision for double-reading in the Writing Adjunct as one more indication that his work will be treated with respect and that suggestions for revision will generally be based on the shared conviction of two independent readers.

After allowing some number of days for the review of his draft, the student returns for a paper conference with a member of the Writing Adjunct staff, usually the instructor. It is generally agreed that in any writing program, the "teachable moment" occurs when a qualified professional meets with a student over a piece of the student's own writing, and in this, the Writing Adjunct is no exception. During the paper conference the instructor and the student discuss the written suggestions for revision, the relative importance of each suggestion, and any additional exercises that would be of particular use to the student. The student leaves the conference with a clear sense of how to begin the process of revision, a process which in the past has seldom involved more than cosmetic changes.

The major objective of the Writing Adjunct program is to train the student to become his own editor. Throughout the term he may observe the actions of the instructors and tutors in the program, and later in the term, he takes part in an editing workshop where he acts in the role of a peer tutor. Each student brings a copy of a paper that he has written during the term (the papers vary in length and subject matter). A sample student paper is presented to the students attending the workshop with the instructions that they are to suggest constructive changes. The students see immediately how much easier it is to label error than to make practical suggestions for revision, to deal with concrete triviality rather than substantive changes. After a general discussion on criteria for evaluating the sample paper and priorities for revision, the students

are asked to exchange the papers that they brought to the workshop with them. The students exchange their papers. Each student is then given a review sheet and asked to serve in the role of "tutor" for the paper he has received. The goal of this exercise is to train the students in the process of revision, not to actually have them serve as untrained tutors and the finished review sheets are placed in the files of the students who wrote the reviews. Throughout the Writing Adjunct, the emphasis has been on revision rather than on spontaneous essays, on the composing process rather than the finished product. The editing workshop provides each student with a set of suggestions and some practical experience for revising his own papers in the future. Once the workshop has been completed, and the student has submitted the required amount of writing in both draft and revised form, the student receives an anecdotal evaluation, outlining the progress he has made during the term and identifying areas for future efforts. In some case,the areas for future work will become goals in a subsequent Writing Adjunct.

As I mentioned earlier, the Writing Adjunct was implemented as a pilot program during the 1975-76 on six CSUC campuses — Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, Long Beach, San Luis Obispo, San Diego and Sonoma. On each campus the adjunct program was adapted to a different purpose and the structure varied slightly. The program at CSU Sonoma where the Writing Adjunct was offered as an alternative to Advanced Composition is closest to our concern today. When the Sonoma program first opened, it was swamped with students and faculty in a great variety of disciplines who offered their co-operation. Despite the novel structure of the course, students stayed with the course throughout the term and frequently reversed personal patterns of writing papers the night before they were due. A full evaluation of the program at Sonoma as well as those on the other campuses participating in the Writing Adjunct Transfer will be available later this summer for those of you who might be contemplating adjunct programs on your own campuses. The rationale for offering the adjunct as an alternative to Advanced Composition is simply this —specialized writing training when it follows

a more general writing course at the Freshman level is a strength rather than a limitation, and with the practical use of the writing training plainly evident, students are more likely to take such courses and exert their best efforts in them even when they are not required. For further information: Two manuals, a Writing Adjunct Instructor's Manual and a Manual for Peer Tutors, are available from the Small College, California State College, Dominguez Hills.